

CURRICULUM AND CULTURAL TRANSLATION

Rosane Karl Ramos

Catholic University of Petropolis, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Rua Mosela, 1601 – cep 25675-017

Petropolis, RJ, Brazil

Phone number: 55 24 2242-6984

Email: rokarl35@yahoo.com.br / rokarllumi@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze the concept of cultural translation applied to the studies of curriculum field. It begins by discussing the term globalization mainly in its economic and social aspects, and how it reflects on education in general. The article then briefly discusses curriculum as narrative, a socially built narrative which is one of the outcomes of joint personal and group experiences of teaching and learning processes that have the knowledge as its main core. Finally, the article discusses curriculum as cultural translation – whether it be of cultures, societies, languages, or perspectives.

KEY-WORDS: curriculum – globalization – cultural translation

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1. INTRODUCTION

To analyze current pedagogical practices involves thinking in a net of interwoven concepts, which make for “open structures joint by knots (intersection points) and not by hierarchical structures”¹. Concepts that have been differentiated throughout time (and space in a certain way) by a number of definitions and uses, according to whom would say them, to whom they were said, from where they were announced. Concepts that have suffered metamorphosis: globalization, frontiers, borders, hybridization, tradition and translation, culture, identity and curriculum studies are but a few of these concepts that permeate the discussion on pedagogical practices, and some of which I will bring under appreciation in this present paper.

By starting off discussing what globalization is and some of its outcomes, I intend to show that it brings huge effects on the construction, loss and re-construction of identities, on the concept of culture, on the inter and intra cultural exchange, and on the curriculum processes. Besides, the fact that we live in a world where the “transnational interactions [make it possible that] an individual may identify him/herself with many languages and life styles despite the persistence of geopolitical frontiers” (GARCÍA CANCLINI, 2008) opens the possibility to think of curriculum as a means for cultural translation.

As the basis for my arguments I have used authors that discuss these concepts, trying to highlight aspects with which they agree on their personal perspectives, but also with which they seem to disagree. My effort has been trying not to stick myself to a single theory on the issue. I have mainly looked up for authors who have been countersigned by their fellow scholars. I have researched on books and journals, especially online international and national journals, like *Transnational Curriculum Inquiry*, *European Journal of Social Theory*, *Journal of Education and Work*, *Estudos Avançados*, *Tempo e Sociedade*. Having as choice criteria the author him/herself, the abstracts and date of publication, I cannot say that this paper is a state-of-the-art one². However, I have tried to use this research technique to assure the contemporary views of the articles, and therefore of the discussions themselves.

2. GLOBALIZATION

The concept of globalization, which has been under discussion in different fields of study, such as economy, sociology, philosophy and education, to name but a few, has also been used to

¹ Nets concept as developed by Manuel Castell, In DELANTY, 2006, p.31.

²“State-of-the-art or state of knowledge, defined as of bibliographic character, has as its major challenges mapping and discussing a certain amount of academic production in different fields of knowledge, trying to understand and give answers to which aspects and dimensions of these fields have been prioritized and highlighted in distinct times and places” (FERREIRA, 2001)

define generically speaking a “new baseline to direct social life, institutionally articulated in a supranational level. (...) [Globalization] expresses likewise the idea of growing interdependence between relationships, structures and social processes in a world level, in which the combined powers (however unequal) of the globalized set overcomes the local or particular realities.” (MELLO, In WILLIAMS, 2007). Globalization has its effects everywhere, leading people to feel both that they are part of it and, in some ways, that they are even able to really act in a kind of reality that goes beyond local frontiers, and also to feel something as a “de-territorialization”³, with a sense of loss of their belonging to a nation-state, unlike what was pretty common a few decades ago.

Globalization is understood by Gerard Delanty as a process that intensifies connections, values and strengthens possibilities for cultural translations, and deepens a global conscience. It is the main motor of modernity according to this author (DELANTY, 2006).

On the other hand, Renato Ortiz (1998) relates the term globalization to economy and technology. He prefers to use the term “worldliness” (“mundialização” in Portuguese) in relation to culture. According to his perspective, in the contemporary world there is indeed only one economy – capitalism - and one technological infra-structure. However, there is not just one world culture, so it does not justify the use of the term cultural globalization. Peter Burke (2003) seems to agree with this perspective when he says that “the changes that we name as ‘globalization’ are mostly technological and economically situated.”

Besides, with a similar perspective, Octavio Ianni (2010) argues that “every national economy, no matter which one it might be, becomes a province of the global economy. The capitalist way of production has entered a global period, strictly speaking, not only just an international or multinational one.” Consequently, capitalism reveals itself as the great motivator of the globalization process, which started, economically speaking, at the end of World War II, with the new cycle of expansion of the industrial production beyond local markets, in order to gain new consuming ones for some industrialized countries, such as (and mainly) the United States of America. Thus, the “world economy” emerged, and with it, the foundation of globalization.

The end of the English and French imperialisms also contributed to this new world demand that rose in and from the countries that had been their colonies. There were new open doors to the capitalism, with huge amounts of work force and a few consuming elites. “Imperialism is over, it has been replaced by neocolonialism and by globalization.” (JAMESON, 2006).

Under this perspective, the press and virtual media in general emerge as powerful instruments in service of globalization and tastes, interests, habits and ideologies massification (Ianni, 2010).

³ “A neologism by Deleuze (...) that has been widely used for all kinds of different phenomena, however I dare say that its first meaning [emerged] exactly at the beginning of capitalism.” JAMESON, 2006, p. 242

Peter Burke (2003) calls our attention to the fact that there is a homogenization of styles, even those that seem to be opposite one to the other, meaning that all styles are at disposal of everyone around the world. At the individual level there are more options of choice; moreover, at the global level, what we can see is the opposite, that is, a reduction in the diversity, since they are all under the impositions of the global market.

According to García Canglini (2008), the cultural industry is focused mainly on the simultaneous contact between the media agents and the millions of viewers. During this fast and intense interchange, we, the millions of viewers do not have time enough to distinguish what should be appropriate, adequate, necessary or not. The structural change that social and personal identities have been having since the end of the 20th century has caused a displacement of the subject – both from his/her place in the social and cultural worlds and from him/herself (Hall, 2005).

Since the globalization basis is the economy, it provides for the global consumerism, which, according to Stuart Hall, makes that individuals may have a “shared identity – as ‘consumers’ of the same goods, ‘clients’ of the same services, ‘audiences’ of the same messages and images – among people who are far away from each other both in time and in space.”⁴ By making us all become “consumers”, for instance, globalization, through capitalism, shows us its homogenizing face. Besides making us equal in our “shared identity” of consumers, clients, audiences, we also form a world mass culture, both by sharing and co-producing cultural goods and manifestations. Music, cinema, literature and so forth go beyond geopolitical frontiers, in a specific standard language that affects a greater and eager to consume public and audience.

Globalization has caused the end of home frontiers between societies and cultures, and the subordination of all to the global market. This tendency has clearly provoked the loss of the richness of the involved cultures’ diversity and uniqueness.

The economic globalization process has caused the creation of a kind of discourse aimed at the commodification, which reflects in education. Some of the consequences are the intense competition among educational institutions worldwide, both private and public, both national and international, for new markets and public; the search for international accreditation and diploma validation; international educational ranks, and the internationalization (and thus, the homogenization) of curriculum.

Nevertheless, where is the local situated inside or despite the global? Where is the space for differentiation, diversity, multiculturalism in globalization? Or does not this space exist at all?

To help me try to answer these questions, I need to make use of another major concept: hybridization. It emerges from the articulation, contestation, and negotiation between global and local. According to Michael Young (2002), “hybridism has appeared in recent times as a response to economic pressures, to overcome the dichotomy between theory and practice”. More than just a mixture, hybridization involves the results of social interactions in which local associates with

⁴ HALL, 2005, p. 74

global, or a culture adapts, frames, molds, and/or resists to another, producing something entirely new, unique, exclusive, “un-repeatable”. Yet, Burke (2003) also argues that the price for hybridization includes the loss of regional traditions and local roots, which may be one of the causes for some of the strong current nationalists and ethical reactions found worldwide that show the intensification of a will to belong to, to be part of a specific identity group or nation. It is a paradox that, at the same time that globalization has its “worldliness” aspects, it also contributes to strengthen in some individuals their adhesion to local, to their locality, to their social group, to their nation – even knowing that the concept of nation itself has been challenged sociologically, economically and politically speaking.

The concept of hybridization seems to walk hand in hand with the concept of globalization, since it makes it possible to understand the importance and the influence of the local in the global. We all take part in a world culture, still we keep a local one as well, even though it is of a hybrid nature.

Nevertheless, the issues regarding global and local and the possibility to integrate both by means of the concept of hybridization bring us another one: who, in fact, has access to this mobility? In Education there is this whole, profound discussion on inclusion versus exclusion, on the forming and yet excluding characters of the educational system, seen as a reproducer of social and economical differences (as it is found in the writings of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (2011), for instance). Here, discussing these issues, we can see the same relation as far as globalization is concerned about physical, symbolical and cultural mobility as well. The number of people who are included in the millions of receptors of globalized products is far less than the number of the millions of excluded people from the globalization process. By inferring this I mean to show that this paper does not intend to naively argue that globalization is in fact a worldwide, equally rated process without power competitions and fight of interests involved in it. Globalization does affect the whole world, but in different ways, depending if we are talking about rich or poor countries, different social classes, social groups and individuals, and the various professional categories.

3. CURRICULUM AND CULTURAL TRANSLATION

“The expression ‘cultural translation’ was originally created by anthropologists (...) to describe what occurs in cultural meetings when each side tries to understand the actions of the other.” (BURKE, 2009). Besides trying to understand the other’s actions, the concept of cultural translation takes us to consider how much influence a language or culture has over another, and how much this “receptive” one, on the other hand, also influences the first. Cultural translation is therefore a double process of decontextualization and reconceptualization. Cultural translation is a two-way road, in which one must consider the interests, for example, in choosing which items are to be translated or not.

In the knowledge field, author Mika Yoshimoto (2005) argues that we learn the world by translation, and that learning another language is to unveil the ideologies of the culture to which it belongs. It is also possible to oppose the ideas of tradition and translation, since “tradition links the relationship between past and present – what was said once and somehow reaches us in present time –, and translation links present and future – what is said or reedited so as to reach the ones yet to come.” (OLIVEIRA, 2007). Tradition, thus, is the basis for our history (personal, social, cultural histories), meanwhile translation opens new possibilities for the present and the future.

However, I shall ask: is it possible to transfer the concept of cultural translation for the curriculum field?

In many texts on the history of the curriculum theory and researches in this field, culture appears as a center line in discussion. To discuss curriculum means necessarily to discuss culture (or else, cultures in plural, since they refer to different social and economical cultures within the nation itself⁵). Every social practice has a cultural dimension and the curriculum, defined as “the result of a process of social construction (...) that keeps close connections with the production of cultural and social identities” (SILVA, 2011) must provide the expansion of the cultural horizon of the student, as well as the school in a broader way.

Cultural translation enables the understanding of connections, interferences, power relations, contradictions, claims and necessities involved among the various cultures. Translation may help that it become “understandable for a specific culture the needs, values, manners, habits, symbols and practices of another.” (MOREIRA, 2002).

The applicability of the concept of cultural translation would be given in the perspective of curriculum as narrative, as text, in which learning is regarded as “something in relation to the life history, situated in a context, thus also having a history of its own – both the individuals history and the communities and institutions history.” (GOODSON, 2007). Narrative generates a creation space, differently from the descriptive method, by which descriptions are always biased, partial, and predicate an objective reality that is always contestable. Narrative takes part of the multiple meanings territory, and these are usually shared. It is possible to have many views on the same narrative, the same text, which gives autonomy to the text in relation to its author. Individual readers bring within them their own life experiences, history, perspectives, habits, beliefs and so forth, and these attributes define their possible understanding of a text. Hence, curriculum may be seen as a social, dynamic and political narrative that enlarges the possibilities to overcome the unifying views of culture.

Cultural changes, interchanges and exchanges in curriculum, through the curriculum, made possible by translation, comprehend various elements that articulate, complement, diverge, interact, contradict one another, composing narratives that convey knowledge and meaning, additionally promoting the creation of something new. In this sense, curriculum may be understood as a

⁵EAGLETON, 2005, p. 25

“cultural hybrid”, considering that by translating and being translated, curriculum makes and is made into something new as well. Nonetheless, it must be pointed out that power relations do exist and take effective part in all this process, whether they are implicit or explicit. These relations should be under scope of negotiation, exchange, resistance, and above all, dialogue. The curriculum in the globalization era should help provide intercultural learning opportunities to students, open up their horizons and perspectives. This opening could provide students with a future work possibility in the global market, beyond their local of birth or residence, or just a better and more comprehensive understanding of their “localness” in the global.

The hybrid cultures constitute one of the many kinds of identities produced in the globalization age. These hybrid cultures and the cultural translation process that inform them do not take place just among people, nations, different languages; they also happen in the place where one happens to live, just like the feeling that one may have of being a foreigner:

El extranjero no es sólo el que está lejos o del otro lado de la frontera, sino también el otro cercano que desafía nuestros modos de percepción y significación. (...) La intercomunicación globalizada nos vuelve extranjeros (...) Nos diversificamos como extranjeros de muchas culturas. (GARCÍA CANCLINI, 2009)⁶

At last, according to Seungho Moon (2012), cultural translation in the curriculum field may challenge the multiple binary oppositions, such as I/Other, East/West, colonizer/colonized. Cultural translation may offer the lens with which it is possible to question the sociopolitical complexity within and among nation-states.

4. CONCLUSION

I have begun this paper by discussing the term globalization, specially focusing on its economic aspects, which has close connections with the capitalistic system. Basing my analysis on some authors, I have tried to indicate the ways in which this concept relates to certain issues, such as culture, identity, localness. Also, that this concept involves power relations, hierarchies, social, and economical stratifications, although there is so much propaganda on the benefits and positive aspects of the globalization.

Afterwards, I have presented the concept of hybridization as the one that allows the dialogue between local and global. Such dialogue not always conveys the same portion of power and strength, the same amount of involvement, concern, mutual influence, though. Nevertheless, it is in this dialogue that emerges the new: a new identity, a new artistic form, a new product, a new image, a new perspective, a new text, a new curriculum.

⁶ “The foreigner is not only the one who is far or on the other side of the frontier, but also the one who is near, the one who challenges our own views and meanings. (...) The globalized communication makes us all foreigners (...) We are diversified as foreigners of many cultures.”

Curriculum as a text, a narrative, something that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A narrative socially built as an outcome of joint personal and group experiences, of teaching and learning experiences that have the knowledge as its main core. And in this sense, the curriculum should help the teacher act as a translator: a metaphor builder so as to assist the students in the knowledge learning process.

Finally, I discuss the curriculum as cultural translation. And that is the reason why I see in the process of translating – whether it be of cultures, societies, languages, perspectives – good conditions to make the teaching-learning process a means to bring forth citizens able to analyze by themselves the local and the global worlds in which we all live, as well as all the implications and consequences it might have. I translate while I am translated, by me and by all the others around me.

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